

VZCZCXRO1495
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHSR
DE RUEHROV #0150 2900731
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 170731Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0818
INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0014
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0014
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 0848

C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000150

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE CERVETTI; DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/17/2032
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [KIRF](#) [CU](#) [VE](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: VATICAN SECRETARY OF STATE TO VISIT CUBA

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher J. Sandrolini, Charge, Embassy
Vatican.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (U) Summary: Secretary of State Bertone is likely to visit Cuba in January of 2008. Bertone's visit would coincide with the 10th anniversary of John Paul II's historic visit, and is intended to assess social and religious developments since then. The Vatican continues to favor dialogue as a general principle and in its relations with Cuba. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Monsignor Angelo Accattino, who covers Andean countries for the Vatican's Secretariat of State (foreign ministry), told Embassy Political Officer on October 11 that Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone would probably visit Cuba in January 2008. Cardinal Bertone's visit would serve to take stock of developments in Cuba and in the Cuban government's relations with the Catholic Church since 1998, when the late Pope John Paul II made his historic trip to Cuba. Accattino maintained that there are some modest but positive signs pointing to greater religious freedom for the Catholic Church in Cuba. Catholics can attend mass and participate in religious celebrations. Catholic media, he added, can operate on the island, albeit in a restricted environment and ever cautious about what it says in order not to run into problems with the authorities. Accattino said that the Cuban government has never closed itself completely to the Catholic Church or the Vatican, noting that the Holy See has always maintained a representation in Havana, even if at one time it was only at the chargi d'affaires level.

¶3. (C) Accattino did not know which side suggested the trip but stated that both the Vatican and the Cuban government thought a visit by Bertone would be appropriate (Note: Accattino stated that the trip has not been confirmed yet, but that it was likely to take place, as reported by international Catholic media. Bertone's visit would be his second, as he traveled to Cuba in 2005, when he was the archbishop of Genoa. End note). Turning to US-Cuba relations, Accattino expressed his hope that US and Cuban leaders would avoid strongly-worded statements or rhetoric, as he thought this is a time for dialogue, not only between the US and Cuba, but also between the US and Venezuela, whose influence over Cuba and the rest of Latin America, he added, is increasing.

¶4. (C) Comment: Bertone had hinted at this visit during his meeting with President Bush in June. Taking stock of the outcome of John Paul II's trip to Cuba ten years after it took place underlines the long-term views of the Vatican in its

relations with other states. Accattino's general appeal for dialogue with Cuba and Venezuela is consistent with the Vatican's overall position to encourage engagement with even the most difficult interlocutors. End comment.

SANDROLINI